



Department of Justice

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THREE SALVADORAN NATIONALS INDICTED ON RACKETEERING CHARGES FOR PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT INTERNATIONAL GANG

Indictment Alleges Two MS-13 Leaders Ordered Gang Murders in United States From Inside Prison Cells in El Salvador

WASHINGTON – A federal grand jury in Greenbelt, Md., has charged leaders of the violent street gang known as MS-13 with federal racketeering crimes, including two men who allegedly ordered murders inside the United States from their prison cells in El Salvador, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales announced today.

The 30-count superseding indictment returned June 4, 2007, alleges that the three defendants—Dany Fredy Ramos Mejia, aka “Sisco,” Saul Antonios Turcio Angel, aka “Trece,” and Rigoberto Del Transito Mejia Regaldo, aka “Ski”—conspired to participate in a racketeering enterprise in the United States and El Salvador that involved murder, robbery, obstruction of justice, and witness tampering through their participation in La Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13. Two of the defendants allegedly communicated with MS-13 gang members from prison in El Salvador to commit a variety of crimes, including one instance which resulted in the murders of two persons in the United States.

Specifically, the indictment alleges that the three defendants and at least 13 others in the United States conspired from at least 2001 to March 2007 to operate an MS-13 enterprise in the United States and El Salvador through a pattern of racketeering activity, including: eight murders in Maryland and one in Virginia; the use of deadly weapons including firearms, baseball bats, machetes, bottles or knives in the commission of murders, attempted murders, and assaults on juvenile females, rival gang members, and an MS-13 gang member from El Salvador; kidnapping; robbery; obstruction of justice; and witness tampering.

“Today's announcement results, in part, from a series of comprehensive anti-gang initiatives undertaken by the Department to target and pursue America's most violent and dangerous gangs,” said Attorney General Gonzales. “I also want to acknowledge the cooperation provided by officials in the government of El Salvador who have strongly demonstrated their commitment to combating MS-13 and other violent gangs that operate in El Salvador, and elsewhere in Central America, Mexico and the United States.”

Among other things, the indictment alleges that in or about September or October 2004, Mejia and Angel produced a videotape of themselves and fellow MS-13 gang members in El

Salvador, in which they communicated to MS-13 gang members in Maryland regarding the activities of MS-13 in El Salvador. The indictment also alleges that on or about Oct. 9, 2005, Angel communicated with members of the Teclas Locos Salvatruchos clique in Maryland via cell phone from inside prison in El Salvador regarding acts of violence, including murder, against rival gang members, and that later that same day, other gang members in Maryland killed two people and wounded a juvenile.

The indictment also alleges that on or about Aug. 21, 2005, Regaldo participated in the premeditated murder of Anber Juarez Sanchez in Howard County, Md. The indictment further alleges that on or about May 27, 2006, Regaldo and others participated in the armed robbery of a grocery store in Reisterstown, Md.

All three defendants are currently incarcerated in El Salvador on charges for crimes allegedly committed in that country. If convicted, each defendant faces a maximum sentence in the United States of life in prison for conspiracy to participate in a racketeering enterprise. All defendants are presumed innocent under the law until and unless convicted.

“This indictment is an example of the strategic approach that the Department of Justice has taken to combating the international and multi-jurisdictional problem of violent gangs,” said Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division. “We have marshaled our resources to ultimately target the leadership of these gangs, whether on the streets of our neighborhoods or in cities abroad.”

“Federal, state and local law enforcement authorities are united with our international partners in pursuing gang leaders who direct criminal activity as well as members who carry it out,” said U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein of the District of Maryland. “If you join a gang that commits crimes, you can be held accountable for all criminal activity committed by other gang members.”

“MS-13 is a criminal organization that has terrorized our nation’s neighborhoods and jeopardized community safety for far too long,” said Acting Director Michael J. Sullivan, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. “This indictment sends a strong signal that anyone who joins the gang and participates in violent acts on its behalf will continue to be brought to justice, no matter where they may hide.”

“This indictment should send a message to MS-13 and other gangs that their violence will not be tolerated in our streets and our neighborhoods, and we will not permit gang leaders to seek refuge outside of our borders to commit crimes within the United States,” said Assistant Director Kenneth W. Kaiser, FBI Criminal Investigative Division. “The FBI’s MS-13 National Gang Task Force, in partnership with local, state, federal and international law enforcement, is working diligently to dismantle MS-13 and eradicate the threat it poses around the world.”

Attorney General Gonzales announced in San Salvador on Feb. 5, 2007, a far-reaching set of anti-gang initiatives in cooperation with El Salvador, Mexico, and neighboring countries. The February announcement included the establishment of a new Transnational Anti-Gang Center (TAG), including up to a dozen investigators from the Civilian National Police (PNC) in

El Salvador, embedded prosecutors from the El Salvador Attorney General's office, special FBI teams assigned to El Salvador, and State Department support. The effort to stand up the TAG center is underway, and PNC investigators who are part of the new center assisted in the investigation in this case.

In matters related to this case to date, 42 MS-13 gang members have been charged with various federal offenses, with 30 defendants charged in this RICO conspiracy case. Jose Hipolito Cruz Diaz, a/k/a "Pirana," Omar Vasquez, a/k/a "Duke," and Henry Zelaya, a/k/a "Homeboy," were convicted at trial by a federal jury on April 27, 2007, of the racketeering conspiracy and face a maximum sentence of life in prison. Edgar Alberto Ayala, a/k/a "Pony," and Oscar Ramos Velasquez, a/k/a "Casper," were convicted at trial by a federal jury in November 2006 of racketeering conspiracies. Ayala was sentenced on June 1, 2007, to 35 years in prison, and Velasquez faces a maximum sentence of life at his sentencing scheduled for July 23, 2007. Nine defendants, all of Maryland, have pleaded guilty, including: Walter Barahona, who was sentenced on April 16, 2007, to 14 years in prison; Franklin Mejia Molina, who was sentenced on Dec. 4, 2006, to more than nine years in prison; and Juan Lopez, who was sentenced on Oct. 16, 2006, to 87 months in prison. Jose Pena Aguilar was sentenced to 10 years in prison on Nov. 6, 2006, for using a firearm in furtherance of a racketeering conspiracy, to be served consecutive to a 20-year sentence received in the Circuit Court of Prince George's County for attempted murder.

The charges span three states, three federal districts, and two countries. In addition to the murders in Maryland and Virginia, and the conduct in El Salvador, the indictment also alleges a relationship to alleged MS-13 gang members and activity charged recently by a federal grand jury in Nashville. That indictment charges 14 defendants with RICO and gun charges and is being prosecuted by the Criminal Division's Gang Squad and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Tennessee.

The charges stem from a long-term investigation initiated by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland, conducted jointly with the Gang Squad of the Criminal Division at the U.S. Department of Justice and a task force headed by the ATF. The Regional Area Gang Enforcement (RAGE) Task Force is comprised of agents and officers from the ATF; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the Department of Homeland Security; the Maryland National Capital Park Police; the Prince George's County, Howard County and Montgomery County Police Departments; as well as the Maryland State Police. Both the FBI's MS-13 National Gang Task Force and the PNC in El Salvador assisted the Task Force with investigating the international defendants in El Salvador.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys James Trusty and Chan Park from the District of Maryland and Trial Attorney David Jaffe from the Justice Department's Gang Squad are prosecuting this case.

Ms. Fisher and Mr. Rosenstein thanked Prince George's County State's Attorney Glenn F. Ivey, Montgomery County States Attorney John McCarthy, and Fairfax, Va., Commonwealth's Attorney Robert F. Horan Jr. for the assistance that they and their offices provided.

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